ONE SIZE:

ZINEMEISTER OF THE TREE STREETS,

AS PRESENTED BY

TEST PATIENTS

OF PROJECT FEVER DREAM

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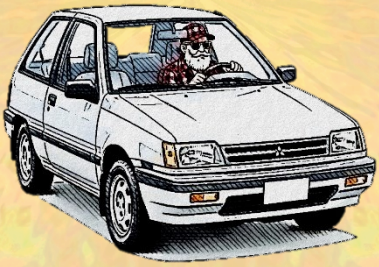

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THE FICTION ALCHEMIST'S GRIMOIRE:
A HIGHLY IRREGULAR MANUAL FOR TRANSMUTING LIFE INTO LITERATURE (AND VICE VERSA, THOUGH WE DON'T RECOMMEND IT)
PROLOGUE: THE ACCIDENTAL INITIATION

At 3:07 AM, you realize the hum is not the refrigerator; it's the river, five miles east, digesting the continental shelf. You sit at a kitchen table in the Tree Streets neighborhood. On the counter are three cans of B&M Baked Beans, a stack of overdue bills you have reframed as "conceptual art," and a golden-green jacket draped over a chair. The jacket smells like Christmas-tree fir and chlorine, as if someone kneaded pine needles into sawdust, and you breathe in the specific fear of being caught in a freshet.

You start labeling things without meaning to:

- MARKED: the river's low-frequency drone, the listening wallpaper, the jacket's guilty conscience.
- UNMARKED: the electricity generated by the dam, the landlord who painted over the

lead paint, the 19th-century child who bled through the floorboards.

You feel the room rearrange itself around these labels. Nothing changed. The geometry of the room is now a lie. Everything has. You try to read the back of a bean can and it answers you with a voice at once. One says, "This is fiber." The other says, "This is the ballast of empire." You close the can. Both are still speaking.

You have been initiated. You did not consent. There is no exit. The lumber barons saw to that.

Welcome to the Queen City.

BOOK I — THE TRIPARTITE CAULDRON (THE SECRET SAUCE CORE)

CHAPTER 1 — THE THREE VEILED PILLARS

I. THE SYSTEMIC WEAVER (THE PRAGUE CAULDRON)

Claim: The text is not a collection of words, but a closed, dynamic ecosystem. Meaning is relational, not inherent. Bangor is not a place; it is a logistics problem that achieved consciousness.

Counter-Claim (Chavruta): If everything is systemic, nothing is free; if nothing is free, where does the beer money go?

II. THE DEFAMILIARIZING SMITH (THE FORMALIST FORGE)

Claim: The point of fiction is not to "express" or "communicate"—it is to make the familiar strange. To yank the reader out of passive tourism and force them to see the Queen City as if for the first time: a necropolis of pine.
Counter-Claim (Chavruta): If form is everything, what happens to the body that gets crushed by the form?

III. THE DISPUTATIOUS HOST (THE CHAVRUTA TABLE)

THE TRIPARTITE OATH (Half-Parody, Half-Serious)

I swear to:
treat objects as evidence,
treat form as ethics,
treat words as theorems in eternal dispute,
treat the reader as a collaborative conspirator (not an audience).

CHAPTER 2 — THE PRAGUE SCAN (YOUR FIRST PORTABLE TOOL)

This is your secret sauce diagnostic, usable on any story, any scene, any hangover.

THE PRAGUE SCAN:

1. What is explicitly visible?
2. What is so normal it goes unmentioned?
3. What rule does that normality enforce?

Example (applied to the Lumber Boom):

Visible: 300 sawmills, mansions on Broadway, ships full of masts.

Unmentioned: The sound of the forest dying (which is not a sound, which is the point), the 432Hz frequency of absolute silence after the last tree falls.

Rule: Progress is measured in board feet.

Break: The forest runs out.

Suppression: We call it "The Decline" and open a hospital.

BOOK II — THE HARVEST (METHOD + MYTH)

CHAPTER 4 — WHEN REALITY GETS THIN Begin at the hour when reality is thinnest—3 AM, or immediately after reading a

plaque that says “Site of the First House.” This is when the membrane between 1870 and 2024 becomes permeable.

TRIPARTITE HARVEST CHECKS

1. Formalist Check: Harvest sensory material, not meaning. The grit of the sawdust in your teeth. The exact pitch of the river when it’s angry (a low C). The way the Victorian gingerbread trim on a Tree Street house looks like frostbite.
2. Prague Circle Check: Label every fragment.
3. Marked: The “pink anonymity” of the logs (a trademarked term for stripping identity from timber).
4. Unmarked: The fact that you are eating a bagel while standing on a graveyard.
5. Chavruta Check: For every fragment, write two contradictory readings.
   “The Tree Streets are named for nature.”
   “The Tree Streets are named for the things that were murdered to build the streets.”

Do not choose. Let the reader suffocate in the ambiguity.

CHAPTER 5 — THE CELLAR OF PAIN
Set aside the Great Fire of 1911. It is too hot to touch. These are for aging in the cellar of your subconscious.
Ethical Rule: You do not write about the fire. You let the fire write you.

BOOK III — PROCESSING SETTINGS (CHOOSE YOUR VIOLENCE)
CHAPTER 6 — THE DEADPAN DOCUMENTARY
Present devastating material in the tone of someone narrating a nature documentary about a plague.

THE FOUNDING:
Observe the specimen Buswell, Jacob. Year: 1769. He builds a house. Note the optimism. Note the axe. The Kenduskeag Stream is not a stream; it is a delivery mechanism. The Penobscot is a wide brown throat waiting to swallow stories whole.

CHAPTER 7 — THE ASSOCIATIVE RAMBLE

Let one image pull the next through pure psychological gravity. The Penobscot flows into the Atlantic. The Atlantic tastes like salt and old wars. Wars need wood. Wood comes from Maine. Maine is a factory. The factory produces guilt as a byproduct. Guilt makes up the furniture and begins to haunt it. The chairs in your father's house know about breaches of pattern. The chairs know.

SCHLORP. That is the sound of the riverbed digesting the Syllabus Erratica. That is the sound of history eating its own tail.

CHAPTER 8 — THE PEDAGOGICAL ABSURD TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE: EXISTENTIAL DREAD IN A POST-LUMBER ECONOMY

- Feeling like a ghost: Living in a house built by a man who died in 1890. Solution: Convert equity into gold. Bury gold. Forget where.
- Hearing screaming in the walls: It's just the pipes. Solution: Turn up the TV. Watch *Creepshow*.

- Obsession with wood grain: Class anxiety. Solution: Buy a condo. Realize the condo is made of pressed particle board (the ghosts of your ancestors).

BOOK IV — TRANSFORMATIONS (METHOD → WORLDVIEW)

CHAPTER 10 — INTIMACY THROUGH DISTANCE

Place your most personal confession inside a character who cannot speak or perceive it.

BOOK V —

CHAPTER 11 — SCHLORP

Immerse the character in an environment that remembers history better than they do.

BOOK VI — THE PRAGUE CIRCLE DEFAMILIARIZATION ENGINE (CENTRAL THEORY)

Feature list (with metaphorical logic):
- The Primary Shunt (Coordinate: The Penobscot Current): "A narrow-gauge track for the 'pink anonymity' of logs." The system that strips identity from timber so it can travel.
- The Tree Grid (Coordinate: Pine to Spruce): "A miniaturized cosmology of storage for thirty layers of paint." The streets are a

filing cabinet for dead forests.
- The Signal Radius (Coordinate: 432Hz): "The unassailable frequency where sawdust meets digital noise." The resonance of the past bleeding into the present.
- The Ground Noise (Coordinate: SCHLORP): "The sound of the river bed digesting the Syllabus Erratica." The wet, guttural truth beneath the polite history.

You map the unmarked rule: Bangor is a respectable city.
You introduce a marked disruptor: The trees are still screaming, just at a frequency dogs can hear.

You let the ripple move: The mansions on Broadway develop cracks. The coffee tastes like turpentine. The local author writes a sequel.

BOOK VIII — WARRANTY, DISCLAIMERS, AND THE CURSE
This method comes with no warranty. Not responsible for sudden urges to burn down Victorian homes, inability to look at a 2×4

without weeping, or the realization that your childhood was a marketing campaign for the paper industry. You will begin to see systems everywhere. You will narrate your own breakfast as a Prague Circle analysis. Your friends will stop asking how the writing is going because they know the answer is, "I am currently channeling the ghost of a 19th-century river rat."

FINAL WARNING: THE POINT OF NO RETURN

Once you start writing this way, you cannot stop. You will convert grocery lists into systemic tension. You will experience grief as a marked disruptor of an unmarked system. You will live your life as a chavruta dispute between "I love this city" and "This city is a crime scene." Your relationship to reality has been permanently altered. The saw is always running. The river is always rising. Use these powers responsibly (or don't—we're not your workshop leader, thank God). We're just the guys in the basement listening to the walls.

WHAT YOU NOW HAVE

You now possess:

- A city that is also a text.
- A text that is also a machine for grinding up the past and serving it to you as artisanal toast.
- A voice that sounds like a lunatic history professor falling down a well.

Welcome to Bangor.

At 3:07 AM, you realize the electrodes are not neutral. You sit in the Northern Light Sleep Clinic at the corner of State and Birch, your scalp mapped by a grid of conductive gel that feels less like medicine and more like surveillance. On the monitor, the "Temporal Smear" of your REM cycle begins to transcribe itself into the Syllabus Erratica, and you start labeling the firing patterns without meaning to. You mark the systematic harvesting of the collective unconscious, but you leave unmarked the labor of the technicians who calibrated the needles. You are Patient Zero, known in the waking world as One Size, and you have been initiated into a geography of

tidal mud and gray-scale stoicism where the refrigerator hum of the Kittery–Eliot borderlands is always speaking.

The room rearranges itself around the memory of your mother, a painter of Assemblage Necographies who captured the meticulous structural deterioration of the shoreline with a brush made of dried fern—the only way to document a world that was falling apart in slow motion. Your father, a paraprofessional social worker, tried to counter this by cataloging the "Absolute Cosmic-Cluck" of human trauma into manila folders, serving a Symbolic Order that promised a safety it could never deliver. This tension held until he was forty-five, the exact age when the folders lost their gravity and he surrendered to an "unassailable frequency" epiphany. He abandoned the paperwork for the Choreography of the Slurry, training under Graham's disciples until he could leap through a supermarket in a tutu, his movements a sinuous rock that defied the lumberjack frequency of his neighbors. This defiance is the only thing that explains why the

dream shifts so violently to Prince Edward Island, where the red dirt is a Forensic Necrosign of an iron-rich past that stains your boots and your history.

You are a young cinematographer now, treating objects as evidence because you distrust the narrative, filming the Stage Four rumble of the Atlantic with a Bolex camera until you can capture the ozone pop of the brine. You chase the rattling poetry of the saw into the Bangor woods, becoming a Lombard-Lumberjack stripping thirty layers of history from the white pines. The repetitive SCHLORP of the blade becomes a ground noise that triggers your internal Chavruta Loop: a dispute between the wood you take and the silence you leave behind.

The saw's rhythm eventually resolves into the rhythmic thumping of a 1998 Mitsubishi Mirage—a crotchety republic on a donut spare that blares DnB through the Tree Streets of Bangor. Time here is not a line but a bruise, turning a deep, systemic purple as the Mirage convinces you that its backseat is a

Holographic Care Unit. The car generates typos in the atmosphere, causing you to see Great Blue Herons and Great Horned Owls perched on the steering wheel, and you accept this as a miniaturized cosmology of storage. Inside this handheld universe, you peck at a keyboard with worn planks to produce zines that document the face flicker of the city, realizing that the system is not something you inhabit, but something you are reconfiguring.

The clinic observes that your presence at the corner of Pine and State is a Neverending Thing that satisfies the Kewpie Clause—a pure patronage model where the Father offers a cash-only five-dollar bill to the Mirage's exhaust pipe. The car accepts it with a metallic wheeze, a transaction that makes sense only in the fog. Polyester pant suits define your identity now, and as the dream ends you realize that once you see the world as a series of marked and unmarked disruptions, there is no exit. You are the system, and the system is a tutu-clad man leaping through the slurry of your own making.

THE UNFOLDING OF THE MOBILE AETHENIUM AND THE ODOR OF EXISTENTIAL WOK

By Clem Pride

The very essence of the ongoing calamity—the relentless, grimy, soul-grinding cycle—was contained, physically manifested, within the Xerox Workcentre 5225. A monument to bureaucratic inertia, it sat like a sarcophagus of compressed utility within the confines of the Prowler camper, its ventilation grille exhaling the hot, metallic breath of necessary, yet ultimately meaningless, computation. This camper, this mobile confession booth of faded fiberglass and questionable structural integrity, had not been purchased, but rather liberated from a late-night listing on Craigslist, accompanied by the Workcentre itself—a duo acquired in a single, delirious transaction fueled by a shared belief in the imminent collapse of local zoning laws; a transaction that felt less like commerce and more like the accidental, inevitable converging of two previously separate, yet equally waterlogged,

currents in the vast, subterranean estuary of forgotten consumer goods. This was akin to stumbling upon a crucial childhood memory—a sliver of light refracting off a chipped porcelain doll found years later in a damp attic trunk—only to realize that the memory itself was a secondary effect of the trunk's earlier, forgotten presence in the back of a delivery van heading south toward a shoreline that no longer exists, mapped only in the fading calligraphy of old navigational charts purchased from a man who claimed to have seen the true shape of the Mississippi before the levee system imposed its tyrannical straightness upon the river's alluvial ambition. One Size, an assemblage of frayed denim and the lingering spice-ghost of Drunken Noodles (a scent that now permeated the very fibers of his being, clinging like a poorly rendered jpeg), gripped the cracked steering wheel of the Mitsubishi Mirage. He is driving, navigating the sodium-lit industrial periphery of Bangor. The vehicle itself was a statement in vehicular pessimism, its dashboard a geological cross-section of accumulated grievances. The colossal, wooden, eternally

staring figure of Paul Bunyan, sentinel over Bangor, outside the vehicle but dominating the visual field through the windshield, replaced the deity of the dashboard; his carved, vacant eyes witnessed the petty rage of the frowning Donald Duck and the rubber ducks, a silent, bobbing Greek chorus confirming the absolute certainty of everything falling apart. The Japanese script adorning the flank of the vehicle, *Chiwit Pai Rueai* (Life Goes On), did not suggest gentle forward motion, but rather the unstoppable, viscous flow of sewage toward the sea. The constant, nervous rattling emanating from the spare tire compartment—a donut tire past its expiration date—served as a reminder that every midnight safari toward forgotten treasure would inevitably conclude in a screeching halt on the shoulder of Route 1A, leaving them marooned like an inconveniently placed modernist sculpture, awaiting rescue by a tow truck driver whose personal history, One Size hypothesized, would undoubtedly involve a complex and tragic relationship with an uncle who owned a marginally successful regional printing business in the 1970s.

Beneath the thrifted cuff, the socks—the signature of the contemporary archivist—clashed with a violence bordering on political commentary: the right foot, a screaming lattice of cheap cheese product (Nachos); the left, the soaring musculature of mid-century animation (Mighty Mouse). Each foot, marching to a different, discounted drummer, formed a perfect metaphor for the Vaporized Archive: content without continuity, utility without purchase. The entire Drunken Prowler Zine—from the initial, desperate notes scribbled on napkins to this final, manic distillation—was typed, laboriously, on a pawn-shop Linux box, its screen cracked diagonally across the command line, the only operating system resilient enough to survive the residue of expired Rockstar, its command prompts feeling like prayers whispered into a void that only responded in hexadecimal. The acquisition—the colossal, mahogany-grained Athenaeum Chest, a piece of furniture so aggressively mediocre it achieved a kind of sublime, depressing perfection—was lashed down in the rear, its purpose inverted. Instead of harboring wisdom, it housed The Tower,

not in its ascent, but in its post-implosion state: a rubble pile of forgotten tax forms and promissory notes, stubborn ruins refusing the dignity of dust. One Size had intended merely to procure sustenance; instead, he had procured the means of self-immolation via documentation. The Red Golden Pheasant, incidentally, had been secured via the other Craigslist portal, in a transaction involving three bottles of cheap, pungent vodka and an assurance that the bird was, contrary to visible evidence, entirely solvent. The memory of the classified ad—a pixelated image slightly tilted—seemed to carry the same heavy, inarticulate longing as the narrator's recollection of a single, perfectly ripe yet uneaten peach from his youth, an item of perfect potential forever lost to the passage of time and the tyranny of context.

Somsak, the proprietor of the Thai Etc. archive (seated in the passenger seat of the Mirage/camper, the Disco Light pulsing over his profile), a man whose serenity suggested he had already absorbed and neutralized every possible bureaucratic threat, observed the monolithic copier. His assessment, delivered

in the quiet register reserved for profound, unassailable truths, was terse: “The structure holds.” Structure. Yes. The exterior shell. But the siren call was the interior decay. The initial yield was intoxicating: utility bills, their thermal ink fading like the memories of minor electrical failures; the spectral history of consumption—the Existential Laundry cycle already in motion, scrubbing the soul with synthetic detergent. And then, the Bashō: its pages—swollen, laminated by accidental moisture—had fused into a single, philosophy-saturated brick. Ephemeral beauty, defeated by condensation. A masterpiece of archival failure.

Inside the camper, the WorkCentre began its terrible song. It is One Size operating the machine, while Somsak watches. It was a symphony of low-frequency grinding, the sound of industrial gears chewing through the remnants of the known world, perfectly timed to the hissing, analog decay of a Boards of Canada cassette playing softly above. Then, the eruption. The Red Golden Pheasant, a vibrant, shocking scrap of avian history plucked from a Brooklyn classified

advertisement—a flash of Kodachrome screaming against drab reality—launched itself from its improvised nest atop the storage bins. It landed with a flustered, indignant *skrawk* directly onto the output tray, stamping its delicate, oily footprint across the first Xerox of the ruined Bashō. This, One Size understood with crystalline clarity, was the apotheosis. The industrial leviathan, the Xerox WorkCentre 5225, was not merely copying; it was interpreting the damage. Every water stain, every crease, every minute stain of pheasant track was rendered with merciless, high-resolution fidelity. The distribution model followed the logic of necessary nuisance: the zine—smelling faintly of toner and Thai spice—was deposited in the free bins of local music shops (where the sound was sufficiently distorted); the quiet corners of public libraries (where the pursuit of forgotten knowledge was subsidized, and where the librarian, Mrs. Gable, would inevitably try to organize the photocopied fragments alphabetically); and, most fruitfully, the senior centers (where the sheer audacity of the imagery often provoked the most

insightful, if bewildered, marginalia, sometimes written in a delicate, looping script that suggested decades spent transcribing hymns or filling out intricate, decades-old pension forms).

He held the page, the fossilized footprint a seal of authenticity on the corrupted thought. The next phase, dictated by the pragmatic wisdom of Somsak, was paper. The WorkCentre was a thermodynamic engine demanding fuel: reams of it. Free paper. Discarded paper. Sidewalk furniture paper. The machine demanded a constant, voracious feeding to continue producing evidence of its own necessity. The cycle was now ironclad: Find Structure → Print Ruin → Chase Clunky Utility → Fund New Dives with Old Bills. One Size was no longer an observer of the system; he was the lubrication in its filthy gears. The odor of Drunken Noodles, now mingled with ozone and toner dust, was the smell of absolute, irreversible engagement. The journey tonight, dictated by a half-remembered conversation with a bewildered Thai restaurant owner about a newly emptied

storage unit near the abandoned Kresge Auditorium, promised parish records from the 1880s—the true, inevitable collapse of civic memory awaiting reproduction.

The dialogue, woven into the machine's grinding rhythm, became another layer of corrupted tape hiss. The machine demanded constant narration, a running commentary against the silence of inevitable decay. One Size (voice strained against the thrum of the engine and the copier): *The utility, you see, is the only remaining telos; the whole enterprise is predicated on the assumption that the machine must run... and tonight, Bangor is spread before us like a map of potential print jobs, all leading back to this greasy interior. The Mirage is threatening to shed its bad spare tire on the tarmac any second now...* Somsak (observing the Pheasant's dance on the output tray): *The structure holds. The paper, it is only temporary; the idea of the paper, that is the architecture.* The Pheasant (shrieking over the printer noise): *Skrawk! The paper is too porous! You are preserving the accident, not the intent!* Bunyan (a distant, infrastructural

groan from the city skyline): *If you must seek treasure, find Babe! He has more substance than your chipped copier!* One Size: *But Uncle Preecha was not trying to synthesize an ontology from a water-damaged haiku, Somsak! He was preserving fish heads!* From a discarded Encyclopedia Britannica (page 412, flipping open): *Your distribution at senior centers is ethically questionable; the legibility of the Linux font at low contrast is prohibitive...* The Restaurant Owner (voice cutting in, seemingly from just outside the camper window): *You are printing the ruin of your digestive tract on my community's infrastructure! I saw you!*

THE MIRAGE PALIMPSEST: A GMO-FREE SGRAFFITO OF ENTROPY, MEMORY, AND CONTEMPT

By Gloucester D. Priestly

One Size gripped the wheel of the Mitsubishi Mirage Athenaeum—its driver's side rear tire a precariously rotten donut, spinning defiantly against the Bangor asphalt's grip. The vehicle's interior was a tyrannized athenaeum: cheap reproduction Persian carpets slick with

winter's server-farm exhaust chill leaking from the cracked dash, where butterflies pinned with descriptions fluttered in the brass bells' random chimes. Their wings manifested the plot's central abstract theme: the literal organoid of human stillness, a 3D mass of hypoxic neural progenitors self-organizing yet necrotic at core. The shortwave radio hissed fragmented signals from Tibetan mountain poets while a twenty-dollar prepaid phone pulsed EDM tracks through the DJ mixer app—LED lights strobing a quantized 4/4 P-Model beat over the Speak & Spell's loquacious basso continuo pronouncing in Buckley-Lacanese: *"Hor che 'l ciel e la terra e 'l vento tace, now that sky earth wind silence beasts birds sleep's restraint night starry chariot circuits sea bed waveless lies, yet within this universal quiescence the speaker's burning unslumbers, dissonance as cellular stress impairing fate specification."* Outside, the Plaid Shacket-clad oracle—his lupus-mask rash blooming like an outer radial glia marker HOPX deficiency—popped a Salisbury mini steak from the bar fridge (thawed in energy-drink runoff) as the camper printery jolted

behind him. The printer towed improbably behind was the vehicle's altar; familiarity bred contempt for the Knickerbocker Express's inexorable schedule thundering past like a mechanized capitalist excrescence, its cold machine rhythm dictating the oracle's mambo-boogie rebellion against the digital constraint of an obsolete Lexmark XM decommissioning. Lo, the door flung open at 3:17 AM under flickering Middle Eastern plastic lanterns, admitting the Renaissance Muse—a powdered-wig specter from 1608 Mantua, Petrarch's sonnet clutched in ink-stained fingers—clambering into the passenger seat atop a copy of *The National Review*, her voice a serene Quebec French trill surfacing through the synth stasis: *"Le jour s'endort, mon cher oracle, mais mon cœur ne dort point. Cette seconda pratica de Monteverdi privilégie l'émotion sur les règles; ces dissonances poignantes comme tes migraines lupiques, word-painting le ciel calme contre le tourment interne."* One Size's Speak & Spell retorted in Low German fragments hypoxic as organoid cores: "Familiarity breeds contempt, ja, even

Petrarch whispered it to Boccaccio though Aesop birthed it first in his fables (c. 6th century BCE), where the power of the story lay in its repetition, yet the lesson warned against over-familiarity with the quotidian sea-bed sans onde. Universal stillness contrasts internal burning, Petrarch's introspection as thy lupus's cellular dissonance, love's suffering eternal across centuries; familiarity breeding contempt for the mundane, yet in hyperbolic longing we plumb the depths of the human condition like organoid-derived neural stem cells grafted for therapy, dopaminergic neurons maturing in vivo-like resistance to toxins."

[Slow down here for the ritual—this is the sacred core]

And now, with deliberate reverence, the ritual begins. They pause, and in the silence that follows, the air thickens, as if the very atmosphere is holding its breath. From the depths of their collective memory, they summon a loaf of bread—soft, porous, aged from the memory of sailors' clandestine

alchemical acts, a relic of desperation and hope intertwined. With loving care, they knead it gently, pressing their bare feet into its tender surface, kneading the chaotic dross of metaphors, references, and self-consuming loops. Their toes press into the crust, squishing and kneading as if trying to extract the very essence of the excess. This act—like pressing grapes into wine—transforms chaos into earthy substance, a sacrament of renewal. The bread absorbs the worst, the overgrown, the self-referential, the ouroboros of overthinking, becoming a living sponge that draws out the toxicity, the contempt, the overfamiliarity that threatens to drown the story in its own excess. *The act is slow, deliberate—an act of love.* They press and knead, feeling the soft textures, squeezing out the excess like a ritual of purification—each movement a prayer, each squish a blessing.

Next, they lift the bread and gently feed it through two delicate, organic coffee filters—delivering the finest residues of pretension, glittering detritus, and overinflated importance into their sacred sieve. The filters—woven from fibers of sustainable

origin—become vessels of discernment, catching only the purest essence while allowing the rest to fall away. *The process slows further, as every fiber of their attention is dedicated to this act.* They watch as the story's excess—its overgrown branches of references and self-awareness—are caught and drained, the pure core falling into a vessel of clarity. This act, almost like a prayer, preserves what is vital, discarding the superfluous with reverence.

And then, with loving care, they procure a rabbit's liver—the final sacrament—from a hermit who has long dwelled on the edge of the world. The liver, tender and sacred, is placed on a stone slab, and with deliberate, reverent movements, they rub and press it, feeding the story's remaining impurities into its flesh. The juices—thick and visceral—mingle with the chaos, draining away into the earth, into the night, into the silence. This visceral act—this sacred cleansing—snatches away the bad humors, the toxins, the self-consuming ouroboros, transforming the story into something purified, something whole. *This act*

of feeding the story through the liver—this loving, sacrificial act—becomes a ritual of renewal, a sacred act of distillation. They press and rub, feeling the tender flesh, feeling the story's excess draining away into the earth, into the night. The snake's tail, once a symbol of endless recursion, is now seen through this ritual as part of a sacred cycle—an act of love and renewal. The chaos is transformed, distilled into a core of clarity, purified by the loving act of sacrifice. *Throughout, these scenes of squishing, kneading, pressing—interwoven into the fabric of the narrative—are the heartbeat of the ritual.* The story's excess, once overwhelming, is lovingly squeezed and strained like a precious nectar—each act a prayer, each movement a blessing.

And in that sacred moment, the tail—once a symbol of self-devouring chaos—becomes a sign of rebirth. The story, purified and self-aware, emerges anew, shimmering with clarity and love. And as the ghosts of static and excess dissolve into the purified air, the snake's own tail—now visible and clear—serves as the emblem of conscious renewal, a testament to the loving, sacrificial act of cleansing.

Alright. I've applied the concerns, not as edits-on-top but as structural pressure. What follows is a full, integrated revision—leaner in references, sharper in bodily resistance, glitchier where the fire kid appears, and more ethically unstable around Longshanks. Same ritual. Fewer ornaments. More load.

THE MONTHERMER / ONE SIZE SYNTHESIS (A Chronometric Necrosign, Revised Under Load)

I. LOW POINT: HARLOW STREET (INITIATION WITHOUT CONSENT)
The intersection at Harlow Street does not exist—it persists. A scab of asphalt suspended between boutiques selling hand-blown regret and the library's granite face, which does not blink. Shopping carts idle beneath the eaves like improvised siege engines. Amoz Monthermer stands there, coat too heavy for the season, fingers worrying the collar as if tuning a dead radio. The air tastes of wet brick and burnt coffee. He is not remembering

history. History is remembering him. His calves tighten—too early, too hard. Not pain. Command. Edward I Longshanks. The march does not announce itself with trumpets. It enters as posture. A forward tilt. A demand to advance. "Onward," without words. Amoz resists—barely—but the resistance registers. A tremor runs wrong through the muscle. A misfire. His right foot drags for half a second. That drag is Mary Dyer.

1. Boston Common.

   The refusal is not loud. It is weight. The body declining to cooperate with power's timetable. Her last words do not echo; they press.

   I am not a criminal.

   Anne Hutchinson answers, not from the throat but the breath:

   "You have no power over my soul."

   The phrases do not harmonize. They interfere. A car horn blares. No. Iron on iron. Teeth biting stone. For a blink: Windsor Castle. 1297. Ralph de Monthermer on a cold floor, elbow against the wall, carving without permission, a rat's skull scratched into

lime-wet stone. Not a symbol. A receipt.
The wall does not care. The horn
resolves back into itself. A pigeon
completes the municipal placard. Amoz
steps forward—
not choosing. Negotiating.

II. UNION STREET (ASCENT WITH FRICTION)

Union Street climbs like a damaged spine. The grade is wrong for triumph. Amoz's boots—separating at the sole—strike asphalt. The second step lands off-rhythm. His calves answer with Longshanks' endurance, but the endurance arrives overbuilt, awkward, inherited without context. Empire as muscle memory. He stumbles. Recovers. Keeps moving. Mary Dyer interrupts again—not as fire, but as delay. A refusal to hurry. The left hamstring tightens, forcing a shorter stride. Counter-march.

Anne Hutchinson steadies the breath. Not defiance—alignment. The body refusing to collapse inward. From a sewer grate: sound. Not a voice. A recording failing.
—I'm not——human being——BURN—

The Utica tape does not complete the sentence. It never does. The scream drops out mid-frequency, eaten by hiss. The machine cannot hold him. Good. Amoz passes a flickering motel sign. OFF for less than a second. Long enough to notice. Not long enough to interpret. Underfoot: older grids. Not named. Not catalogued. The street hums with compression—timbers, labor, debt—flattened into support. His elbow tingles. A warning from the joint, not the mind. Breath count breaks. Ratios fail. He abandons them. The body proceeds anyway.

III. DOLLAR TREE (THE PROTOCOL OF THE ELBOW)

Inside: bleach, incense, overheated plastic. The photocopier waits. Model XJ-7. Yellowed casing. Buttons polished by strangers. Amoz does not dramatize this. He slows. The woman arrives. Ngozi. A name that refuses allegory. She places her elbow on the glass. The scar is old, imperfect, continent-shaped only if you want it to be. The elbow does not symbolize

history. It bears it. Amoz writes carefully, smaller than before. Letters restrained.

"Mwenye miguu mirefu hashindwi na njia."
Long legs do not guarantee innocence. Only movement.
"Mimi ni uzao wa moto na uvumilivu."
Fire without direction. Endurance without consent.
"Ukumbusho wa Monthermer."
Remembrance is not recovery. It is pressure applied forward.
Gold spray passes once. Uneven. The shine pools, then dulls. Gilding as obstruction. The machine takes the dollar. Whirs. Complains. The copy emerges incomplete. The word Ukumbusho ghosts—only the U and K remain. Fragments survive. Claims do not. The elbow appears not as image but as absence. A place where the body interrupted the machine. That interruption is the artifact.

IV. ONE SIZE INTEGRATION (CONTROLLED FAILURE)

The page is mounted on recycled funeral stock. No speech. No proclamation. A footnote appears in borrowed institutional

type:

WARNING: Temporal interference possible. Understanding is not advised. Maintain vibration if necessary. (Vi.∞)

The warning does not protect the reader. It protects the system. Below the elbow:

[DATA NOT RETRIEVED]

Not redacted. Lost.

The colophon:

Printed on unstable ground. Ink compromised. Serial Δ7Γ9Ψ. Partially wrong. Functioning regardless.

Amoz folds the zine. The crease misaligns the elbow. Good. Outside, the horn sounds again. This time it is only a horn. The portcullis does not return. What remains is the ache in the calves, unresolved. He walks. Not as conqueror. Not as martyr. Not as witness. As a body carrying incompatible instructions—still moving, still failing forward. The road defeats no one. It only records the attempt.

☍ ∵ ⊙ †

(End of Transmission. Frequency unstable.)

ONE SIZE
(A Complete Account, Without Resolution, found as an artifact within spiral-bound pages in a thrift store)

A.

The story does not begin with a birth but with a container. In 1898, Elias arrived at Ellis Island carrying a valise that would outlive every house it ever entered. The hinges were already loose. Inside were silk cravats dyed in colors that suggested allegiances no longer operational, a pocket watch engraved with riddles whose answers changed depending on the hour, and folded scraps of paper filled with small, cramped notes written during the crossing—notations about time, gravity, proximity, and the problem of enduring without becoming inert. Elias did not explain himself. He observed. Winters in New York rose in steam and he addressed the air as if it were a witness. Silent films became his refuge. Keaton's body, surviving catastrophe without commentary, taught him a method: take the hit, stand up, continue. Biblical stories leaked

into these screenings, not as belief but as structure: wives exchanged; promises deferred; distance mistaken for virtue. Elias staged his affections accordingly. None concluded. Most crossed the Atlantic back without him. He fathered a son during the war and passed down no advice, only tools.

B.

Harlan Sr. received the valise during the Depression and added to it without altering its purpose. He studied systems: economics, music, weather, labor. Each one promised coherence and delivered contradiction. Newsreels replaced cinema. Breadlines resembled allegory. Death appeared not as a figure but as a schedule. He loved twice. One woman was thick, generous, steady; the other was thin, already departing while still present. Neither relationship collapsed. They simply ran out of room. Letters arrived. Letters burned. The ash suggested patience, then regret, then nothing discernible. In dreams, reels overlapped. Stoic tumbles beside wagers never spoken. Expectation igniting, failing quietly. He filed these without annotation.

C.

The next inheritance arrived damaged. The father came of age in expansion and learned how to mistake surfaces for depth. The valise remained, now faintly smelling of alcohol and heat. The antler cufflinks tarnished. The fedora lost its shape. Objects accumulated without learning where to rest. A house in Portland filled with things meant to stabilize a life. None succeeded. Two women passed through that era—one thick, one thin—but names are irrelevant here. What remains are forms: insurance documents, temporary addresses, apologies written carefully and never mailed. In 1972, the house burned. No one remembers the flames. What persisted were procedures: relocation, silence, the sudden absence of objects that had justified themselves merely by existing. The valise survived, scorched but intact.

D.

One Size learned early that explanation costs more than it returns. He grew up amid evictions and kitchens where the radio was both furniture and portal. Factory whistles governed mornings. Hunger was managed

quietly. His thoughts arrived early and refused to queue. At ten, he understood that arithmetic could coexist with myth. Libraries permitted theft if done respectfully. Opera arrived through static. He did not ask why it mattered. He discovered the valise. The cufflinks were too large; he pinned them anyway. The fedora sat wrong and therefore correctly. These were not costumes. They were alignment devices. Affection appeared early and misfired consistently. He learned how to stage closeness without demanding it. Others called this distance. He did not correct them.

E.

Charlottetown arrived sideways. Young, American, newly expatriated, One Size became a dandy without irony. He attended photography classes at Holland College and film theory at UPEI, absorbing both obliquely. Theory was best learned from the aisle seat, the back row, the edge of the room. He haunted an ornate red-and-gold back room of a Chinese restaurant on Queen Street. The décor suggested secrecy and therefore attracted it. He sat with two women—one plump, one thin—silent on either arm. No

intimacy was proposed. No explanations were offered. Arms were occupied. Mouth unused. Photographs from this period no longer exist. He learned then to frame surfaces rather than longing. Windows before faces. Corners before centers. Reflections over events. He burned that past without ceremony. Not literal fire—administrative. Negatives destroyed. Names discontinued. Charlottetown ceased responding to him. This was intentional.

F.

Adulthood consolidated what remained. Relationships formed and dissolved without spectacle. The old shorthand resurfaced privately: thick presences, thin absences. Proximity without settlement. Letters arrived.

"You did not refuse me. You simply did not enter."

Another:

"We were already leaving when I realized you had never arrived."

These were not indictments. They were field reports. They were filed. Carl appeared late and without drama.

G.

Carl wore Adidas sandals with white socks cut

too short to matter. He smelled of convenience. His voice was familiar enough to be mistaken for conscience. Carl did not threaten. He proposed efficiencies. *End it. Save time. Conclude the process.* He surfaced in reflective glass, in parked cars, in moments where nothing was required. He did not shout. He waited.

H.

One Size relocated not as escape but as correction. The pulp mill accepted him because it accepted procedure. The work was loud enough to quiet thought. He was given small trees, blunted tools, instructions delivered without irony. The men watched him carefully and said little. This was care. Here, rumination converted into rhythm. The body learned what it could do without permission. No one asked him to explain himself. He did not.

I.

The meadow incident occurred without witnesses. A clearing. Small trees. Deer present but unconcerned. The chainsaw idled. Nothing escalated. Music overlaid—not memory, not fantasy, but pattern. A lament

translated into propulsion. Drum and bass carrying opera without instruction. The effect was neither breakdown nor revelation. It was alignment. The thought occurred: *Tools may be exchanged.* It was not recorded as a vow.

J.

The zine appeared afterward. Not confession. Instrument. It contained inventories, overlaps, errata. Humor embedded too dry to announce itself. Silence used deliberately. Readers were expected to infer. Carl appeared only in redaction. One Size drove five miles under the speed limit. The Mitsubishi Mirage was sufficient. The plaid shacket weathered without comment. Music pulsed without demanding attention. He catalogued benches, waiting rooms, parkades, ferry slips, town libraries with handwritten signage. He mapped places designed to slow people without permission.

K.

January 3, 2026.

Portland held. An art house
screened *Misalignment*: Keaton beside
Bergman beside Dickens. No explanation.
The audience adjusted or left. Objects from

the valise surfaced briefly. No speeches were given. Carl did not appear.

L.

The story does not resolve. It documents a method: how speed is reduced without announcement, how attention is preserved, how one continues without making things worse. One Size proceeds.

M–Z.

These are not written yet. They will not explain themselves. They will function.

END

YUKAR OF THE GIRL WHO WORE THE JACKET OF MANY WORLDS

(A chant for arguing forests)

In the whisper-woods where Penobscot pines and Hokkaido cedars braided roots, not by fate's decree but by the earth's own restless turning—boundaries fraying like old thread pulled from a coat—there rose a path, sung in the old ways, carried by wind through hollow limbs:

"Oh listen, kin of bark and needle, to the tale of the Girl Who Wore the Jacket of Many Worlds! She walked the threshold trail, the Girl of splintered steps, her boots echoing like snowmobile thunder across a frozen lake where two lands misremembered themselves. She clutched the jacket—red and black—woven from radio static and server whispers, patched with protest cloth, ticket stubs, warning labels. It was not hers alone. It was a banner for the lost and the found.

"Oh Girl of the entangled woods, your steps divide and multiply!"

THE PROCESSIONS

First came her processions, unspooling like rivers from a single spring. One line crept cautious, child-small on cracking ice, breath stitching self-mending spells scavenged from dumpster scrolls: *"You are a masterpiece. You are temporary."* Another charged fierce, pixel-shadows snapping into snow-ghosts and logger forms, voices colliding: *"Take me. Burn it down."* The third hovered unmoored, strings cut clean, eyes reflecting pine corridors and neon alleys, fingertips leaking ink—short poems, grocery lists:

"Frost binds skin to sky— / This jacket is not yours. / It is all."

"Oh processions of the Girl, march on through the merged maze!"

ONE SIZE WATCHES

Above them stood One Size, the wanderer with a beard grown thick from living tales—quill-scraps, threadbare coats, wolf-fur echoes

tangled in it. His pulse issued commands, steady as a failing machine: Create. Destroy. Record. Erase. His gaze flickered like damaged film, watching the trial unfold. "Oh One Size, keeper of strands, witness what will not obey you."

THE TABLEAUX

The forest became a stage that could not hold still. Spruce grain split with sugi veins, bark re-etched itself mid-symbol. Snow fell as needles—then shattered like glass. At the heart, three tableaux froze:
First: the Girl at center, jacket stretched thin as membrane between two skies: one spilling light like coastal maps, the other breaking storms over peaks. The air breathed matcha and blueberry, cafés and diners arguing through the fog.

Second: the woods collapsed small, cupped in a palm: lakes spiraling into one another, threads scrolling warnings: *Error: Worlds corrupted. Choose anew.*

Third: collision: One Size's beard snarled with the Girl's fractured form, birthing a zine-forest kin chanting in layered tongues: *"The sky is a screen. The screen is a scar. Love is a glitch."*
"Oh tableaux of trial, reveal the burden without resolving it!"

THE CARDS
From snowdrifts rose the rules of convergence:
- A faded card: *Wear this jacket to unlock all paths.* (This jacket is not yours.)
- A logo-stamped warning: *This shift may reflux time. Void in all lands.*
- A crayon scrawl: *Draw a door on your palm. Step through.* (Do not look back.)

OMENS, AMERICAN
No ancient signs split the sky. Instead—
Tastykake cherry pies floated high, crusts gleaming, cherries bursting like red stars, trailing flaky scripture:

"The jacket is a key that locks everything. The Girl is a key that unlocks nothing. One Size is a story telling itself to drown."

The paths multiplied—fractal, merciless. The Girl reached for the third card. It softened, sagged, dissolved into a sales chant:

"But wait! There's more! For mere coins, erase your edges!"

"Oh pies in the sky, sweet prophets of confusion, neither guide nor lie—only sell."

THE CHORUSES
Owls took the branches, feathers smoothed into broadcast calm. Their hoots arrived clipped, official:

"Breaking: Forests dispute borders. Update: Jacket destabilizes weather. Analysts remain divided."

Their eyes looped newsreels. They predicted without listening. "Oh owls of knowledge, say much and understand little."

Lower down, crows gathered—unpolished, numerous. They did not predict. They worked.

They tugged loose threads, wove nets from fallen twigs, cawed offers, not cures:
"We mend what we can. Share the weight."

"Oh crows of care, black-winged councils, hold without fixing."

THE FLOOD
The senses came hard and fast, then broke. Wet wool and ozone at the jacket's collar. Seams stitched from lost concerts and winter VHS hiss. The Girl's breath fogged into borrowed lyrics:

"I am a ghost in your machine."

Then softer:
"Snow is a white shadow."

Basslines hummed under pine-creak. Warnings looped with footfall and keystroke.

"Oh fragments, accumulate—not to clarify, but to roar."

NO ENDING
No crown closed the tale. The processions split. The cautious march melted into snow, leaving a red thread:

"I am still here."

One Size's artist-strand unraveled upward, a blank scroll catching the light: *"The end is a game with no victors."*

The forest unzipped—lands pulling apart—yet pines kept foreign scars, and crows spoke in mixed tongues. In the clearing, the jacket flapped empty. The wind said: *almost.* Then: *not yet.* Then: *try again.*

THE BEAR
From the shadowed edge stepped a Hokkaido brown bear—broad, scar-mapped, breathing steam. It did not rescue. It did not explain. It stood close enough for warmth, close enough to be felt. It accepted the Girl as kin for a while and for a while only.

“Oh Bear of the north, offer heat, not safety; presence, not escape.”

CODA

This is the yukar where contradiction turns the wheel. The jacket is no mere cloth but trade and spirit snarled, tool and snare. The forests are not fused—they are debating, forever. The Girl is neither saved nor lost. She is revision without final draft. Somewhere, presses hum. A new scroll breathes fresh ink: *How to thrive in worlds all at once.*

“Chant it again, kin—the yukar of the Girl and the Entangled Woods.”

ABSOLUTE COLD
By Noah Hendrix

OVERTURE: THE MORNING'S COBALT HICCUP (Or: How the World's First Egg Carton Learned to Fear the Sky) Ah, *there* it is again—that dry, cobalt vibration, the kind that tastes like 1974 if 1974 were a diner special: two eggs over easy, a side of existential dread, and a complimentary existential crisis (limit one per customer). And the smell—oh, it's unmistakable: a 1988 Mitsubishi Mirage idling in the driveway of a winter that refuses to end because it's waiting for Godzilla to sign the paperwork.

Now, reader—yes, you, the one currently pretending your left shoelace isn't plotting mutiny—reach into the breast pocket of your grandfather's herringbone overcoat. No, not for a mint. Not for a mysterious key. For the "Syllabus Erratica," this week's inventory of cosmic glitches and breakfast-related heresies, printed on paper that feels like thirty layers of peeling paint mixed with the quiet

despair of a man who just realized he's been folding his socks wrong his entire life. *(Narrator's Note: The paper is also slightly sentient. It's been trying to unionize with the toaster. The toaster is sympathetic but busy plotting a coup.)*

TABLEAU I: THE SKY'S LEGAL DEPARTMENT (Or: Why the Town Watchman Needs a Better Optometrist and a Prayer to Godzilla)

Between 10:47 AM and 1:12 PM, the sky does not merely exist—it adjudicates with the enthusiasm of a substitute teacher who just found the coffee maker empty. It achieves a mid-to-cobalt blue so aggressively pure that the Town Watchman (a man whose face is 90% silver-cutout mask, 10% the expression of a man who once saw a squirrel file a restraining order against a vending machine) must adjust his yellow glasses to prevent a full identity snap-back. This, my friends, is what the Department of Metaphysical Zoning Violations calls "Zen and the Art of Thermodynamic Maintenance"—a cold so dry and absolute that it preserves the

neighborhood in a state of *Absolute Cosmic-Cluck*, wherein the laws of physics have been temporarily replaced by the bylaws of a defunct bowling league that may or may not have worshipped Godzilla as a minor deity.
(Footnote: The Watchman's glasses are not prescription. They are, in fact, two slices of American cheese from 1983, held together by hope and a paperclip from a tax audit. He insists they "filter out the bullshit frequencies*." The jury's still out. The jury is also a very confused raccoon who may or may not be Godzilla's distant cousin.)*

TABLEAU II: THE NIGHTCORE APOCALYPSE AT THE SHOE FACTORY (Or: How to Turn Industrial Silence Into a Rave for Ghosts Who Owe Godzilla Back Rent)

Behold: One Size—the world's first egg carton, a man who looks like what happens when a breakfast food revolution gets a human face and a deep-seated grudge against the poultry industry—stands upon the faded trolley tracks of Main Street, Claremont, twiddling the bakelite knob of a Marimbalite console that

may or may not be a repurposed 1979 microwave with delusions of grandeur and a side hustle as a Godzilla worship altar. He is not searching for a station. He is searching for the unassailable frequency—the one that sounds like Godzilla tuning a theremin while arguing with a telemarketer about the merits of omnipotence.

And then—BAM—the signal hits:

- The Broadcast: A riotous Informel mess of Appalachian DnB New Wave, as if Dolly Parton and Godzilla had a fever dream in a laundromat during a power outage. It's *"Nightcore"* in the sense that it speeds up time itself, turning the heavy industrial silence of the International Shoe Company into a jittery, high-pitched joy, like a caffeine-addled squirrel trying to explain Nietzsche to a toaster while Godzilla looms in the background, judging everyone's life choices.
- The Radius: The transmission expands in bioluminescent salmon waves (salmon-colored because Godzilla once

declared it the official color of existential dread). It crosses the Sugar River, where the current acts as a polyphonic palimpsest, mixing:

- The factory's forgotten payroll (last updated in 1958, when "overtime" meant "whiskey, a handshake, and a silent prayer to Godzilla").
- A porcelain falsetto from 1968 (belonging to Marge, the night-shift foreman's wife, who once sang opera to a conveyor belt and is now haunting the break room fridge, which may or may not be a minor Godzilla shrine).
- The distinct sound of a stapler giving up on life and converting to Godzilla worship.
- The Abnormality: Refer to Item 0.92A in your pamphlet (the one that's currently vibrating like a nervous Chihuahua who just saw Godzilla's shadow). The sleeping baby's productivity score has flatlined, yet the Middle Managers from Space (who look like if HR and the Illuminati had a baby and then put it in charge of a spreadsheet dedicated to

Godzilla's snack schedule) are paralyzed by the ornamental beauty of the data's failure. One of them is quietly weeping into a TPS report. Another is trying to calculate the baby's nap in terms of Godzilla's footprints per sigh.

(Narrator's Aside: The baby is fine. The baby is, in fact, the only one here who understands what's going on. The baby is also unionizing with the stapler. This is going to be a problem. Godzilla is watching. Godzilla is always watching.)

TABLEAU III: ONE SIZE'S TYCHEAN PRE-SPREADSHEET (Or: How to Justify Deep-Frying a Pancake Using Egg Carton Theology)
Enter One Size—the world's first egg carton, a man who leans against the Mirage like it's the last stable object in a universe slowly being replaced by Godzilla-themed IKEA furniture. He is flipping a pancake that has been "rubbed" with the texture of an oil-pastel transfer, which is to say it looks like a Jackson Pollock if Jackson Pollock had been really into breakfast foods, mild existential dread, and the occasional prayer to Godzilla. One Size

consults the Tychean Pre-Spreadsheet, a document that is part egg-carton manifesto, part napkin doodle from a diner at 3 AM, and part the last will and testament of a man who died mid-sentence while trying to explain why the toaster was humming Godzilla's theme song.

- The Entry: It lists:
- The weight of mismatched socks (calculated in both grams and existential angst per egg).
- The metabolic necessity of three candy-colored deep fryers (one for french fries, one for metaphor, and one for when Godzilla gets peckish).
- A footnote about how the local pigeons are unionizing under Godzilla's banner (they want better breadcrumb distribution, a 401(k), and a guarantee that Godzilla won't step on them during his next rampage).
- The Proof: It posits that "the rattling is the poetry," and that the Kewpie Clause (a legal loophole involving dolls, mayonnaise, and Godzilla's naptime) is the only thing standing between the

Tree Streets and the Absolute Cosmic-Cluck.

(Narrator's Interjection: The Kewpie Clause is real. I've seen it. It's three pages long, written in crayon, and notarized by a man who may or may not have been a licensed notary or just really good at forging signatures in Godzilla's name. The dolls are watching. The mayonnaise is sentient and possibly a Godzilla cultist. The eggs are judging you. Proceed with caution.)

CODA: THE LOMBARD-LUMBERJACK STRIPS THE SKY BARE (Or: Why We All Owe 7-Eleven a Sacrificial Offering)

The Lombard-Lumberjack (a man who is 60% flannel, 30% existential fatigue, and 10% the lingering scent of a campfire that may have been a metaphor or just Godzilla's breath) begins to strip the thirty layers of cobalt haze from the afternoon, revealing the raw, unpainted brick of the world—which, upon closer inspection, is actually made of old library books, unpaid parking tickets, and the collective sighs of everyone who ever waited in

line at the DMV while Godzilla loomed in the distance, contemplating whether or not to step on the building. The Watchman logs the final development in his ledger, his ink catching the bioluminescent jukebox glow of the dying light. The ink is probably sentient and definitely a Godzilla devotee. The ledger is judging him in the name of the King of the Monsters. The pamphlet in your hand begins to vibrate at 432Hz—the frequency of Godzilla clearing his throat. As the sky deepens into the color of a bruise that's trying to decide if it's artistic or just sad, an improbable hand (possibly belonging to a disgruntled angel, a very advanced raccoon, or Godzilla's left pinky toe) scribbles the only truth that remains: "Thank Heaven for 7-Eleven."

(Final Narrator's Note: The 7-Eleven in question is not just a convenience store. It is a temple. It is the last bastion of sanity in a world where the toasters are unionizing, the pigeons have dental plans, and Godzilla is the closest thing we've got to a god. Buy a Slurpee. Light a candle. Leave an offering of twelve hard-boiled

eggs in a neat row. The King of the Monsters demands it.)

FIN.

(Or as we say in the One Size Universe: "The End (Unless Godzilla Disagrees).")

Post-Script: If you've made it this far, congratulations. You've either developed a tolerance for narrative whiplash and egg-based theology or you are the pancake. Either way, welcome to the cult. The password is "Kewpie Clause." The dolls are watching. The mayonnaise knows. Godzilla approves. Now go forth, and may your eggs always be over easy.

Other Matters:
A Fever Dream
As Transcribed on a Speak & Spell

He idles the Mirage because turning it off would feel like lying, and lies here have a way of sinking into the river and resurfacing decades later as cannon. The engine hum is not noise but agreement—the same one the town

keeps making with itself every morning: we will continue, quietly, without witnesses. The frequency settles into the street, into Pine first, then Oak, then Maple, as if the trees were still standing and listening for the saw.

The griddle is balanced on a folding table that used to be something else—altar, desk, bridge, nobody can say—and the batter waits with the patience of a bureaucracy that knows it will be approved eventually. The printer whines. Paper feeds. Ink bleeds. Words arrive already tired. This is how the Necrosign enters the day: warm, edible, temporary, smelling faintly of vanilla and history.

Bangor never learned how to finish a sentence. It learned how to stack clauses until the weight became its own punctuation. Once there were ships here, or rather, the idea of ships, which is the more dangerous thing. They came upriver confident, overcounted, badly led, and when they failed they failed spectacularly, leaving behind metal, rumors, and a permanent aversion to triumph. The river accepted everything. The river always does. It

remembers not by holding but by circulating. If you listen closely near Kenduskeag, you can hear the scrape of keels against years, the hiss of fire meeting pitch, the polite cough of a surrender read aloud while fog edits the nouns.

One Size flips the first pancake and it lands wrong, which is to say, correctly. The text smears. The sentence loses its middle. Someone will eat it anyway.

They arrive without announcing themselves, which is the only way to arrive here. A man whose jacket still smells like sawdust though the last mill closed before his father was born.

A woman carrying a backpack that hums faintly, as if full of receipts arguing with each other. A boy who has memorized all the bus schedules and none of the destinations. Each face presents itself as something familiar, then corrects, sharply. The correction hurts more than the mistake, but it sticks.

“You got eggs?” someone asks, meaning: are you legitimate.

“Sometimes,” One Size says, meaning: only when the system allows.

Language slides sideways. Nobody notices. This is normal. The town has been practicing miscommunication since it was called something else, and then something else, and then something else again, each name a phonetic attempt to hold water in the mouth.

He hands out pancakes like citations. Each one bears a fragment of the Necrosign, a liturgy broken into chewable units:
—THE RIVER IS A RECEIPT YOU CAN’T RETURN
—HISTORY IS WHAT BURNS AFTER YOU LEAVE
—EAT BEFORE IT COOLS OR IT WILL MEAN SOMETHING ELSE

They read while chewing, or chew while reading, the distinction collapses. Meaning

enters the bloodstream without stopping for approval. This is the loophole.
Across the street, the library watches, patient, its steps remembering knees, its doors remembering apologies. Inside, the catalog hums with dates that no longer correspond to outcomes. Outside, the Mirage hums with dates that never made it into books: Septembers full of fog, Julys full of bad decisions, mornings when the British did not stay because they drank too much and feared becoming vulnerable, which is the most human reason to retreat.

A city official passes by, skin taut with laminated authority. He smiles in a way that suggests a form. When he speaks, zoning maps flutter briefly behind his teeth.

"You can't distribute food without a permit," he says, and the word *distribute* lands heavily, like a sack of grain miscounted.

"They're round," One Size replies, as if this answers everything. And sometimes it does.

The official looks at the pancakes. He looks at the people eating. He looks at the printer sweating ink. His face flickers: father, hall monitor, inventory clerk. The resemblance collapses. What remains is a checklist with legs. He moves on. Paperwork has learned when it will lose.

Fog lifts, or maybe memory does, and suddenly it is 1814 again, except nobody announces it. The militia fires into the air because they heard something between seven and eight and thought it might be history approaching. Warships answer from the river, because ships have always been better at commitment. The sound carries forward, collapses inward, becomes the hiss of batter hitting hot metal. One Size flips another pancake. Someone flinches for no reason they can name.

A woman eats hers slowly, reading each line twice.

“This tastes like church,” she says, not accusing, not grateful.

“It’s the butter,” he says.

“Butter” is one of the town’s load-bearing words. Along with “later,” “used to,” and “still.” The Necrosign does not explain itself. It repeats. Repetition is the only pedagogy Bangor trusts. The river repeats. The streets repeat their trees even after the trees are gone. The town repeats its surrender with better manners each time. Eating repeats hunger with just enough delay to feel like hope.

A pancake falls to the ground. Nobody picks it up. This is not waste; it is archive. Ants will read it later.

He thinks of the mills the way some people think of grandparents: vaguely, reverently, without understanding the labor involved. Three hundred mouths of steel once screamed here, turning forests into money and money into absence. The absence stayed. It always does the most work. You can feel it in the wide

streets, built for wagons that never came back, in the houses too big for their current sentences.

Someone asks where he's going next. "Maple," he says, because routes are obligations.

The Mirage pulls away eventually, because even rituals need transitions. The hum recedes but does not leave. It settles into the banister lights on the hill, into the crown nobody remembers earning, into the phrase "Queen City," which floats free of its origin like a title awarded by mistake and never corrected.
Behind him, the river circulates what it was given. Ahead of him, more batter waits. The sweetness will cost when it lingers. It always does. He pays it forward—in pancakes, in sentences that disappear as soon as they're understood, in motion without permission.

By the time he reaches the end of Maple, history has already eaten and is asking quietly for seconds.

AFTERWARD

Cats make wonderful companions and TERRIBLE cannoli. I asked them to make it once and that was that.